

Fact Sheet



Safe Steps to Rid Your Home and Garden of Pests

Information for Older Adults and Family Caregivers

Many products we use inside and outside our homes contain strong chemicals and poisons.

These products may come in spray cans, as a powder, as a gel, or as a liquid. The word "Pesticides" refers to all of the following chemicals that are applied in the home and garden to kill pests.

- Insecticides kill pests such as fleas, mice, ticks, cockroaches, spiders, and mosquitoes.
- Herbicides kill weeds, poison ivy, crab grass, and other things you do not want in your lawn or garden.
- Disinfectants kill germs on sinks, tubs, toilets, countertops, and other surfaces.
- Rodenticides kill mice and rats.

Eight out of ten households in the United States use some of these pesticides.¹

Dangers of Using Strong Chemicals and Poisons

Insecticides, herbicides, disinfectants, and rodenticides can cause health problems if they are not used carefully. Most health problems are caused when a product is not used in the right

way. A small amount of exposure to these products can cause headaches, dizziness, muscle twitches, nausea, and weakness. These symptoms go away after a while. If you use these products over a long period of time, or are exposed to high concentrations of these chemicals, they could cause serious health problems.

Although the government tries to remove any pesticide that causes long-term effects such as cancer, reproductive or neurological problems from the market, the science and process of regulating such risks often takes time. Therefore, a sensible precaution is to reduce unnecessary pesticide use and, when using these chemicals, keep exposure to a minimum. Grandparents and older adults can play an important role in keeping pesticides and other cleaning products out of the reach of children.

If you spot symptoms of poisoning, call the National Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Safe use of pesticides is important to persons of all ages.

Older adults may be more susceptible to these chemicals because of changes their bodies are going through as part of the normal aging process.

Footnotes:

¹ U.S. EPA, National Household Pesticide Usage Study, 1992, Office of Pesticides Programs

² National Poison Control Center Data, 1993-1998

Safety Precautions at Home

- Read the label and follow the precautions. If you have a hard time reading the print, ask someone to read the label to you.
- Always keep products in the container they came in.
- Never use an empty container to store anything else.
- Dispose of pesticides according to label instructions.
- Always use outdoor products outdoors. Never use them indoors. Do not use them on windy days.
- Before using products outdoors, close the doors and windows of your home.
- When treating a large area leave doors and windows open to provide plenty of ventilation.
- Keep people and pets away from areas where products such as sprays and foggers have been used. The label will tell you how long to keep the area clear.
- Only use the product in the problem area, and use only the amount that the label says to use.
- After you have used a product, wash the parts of your body that might have been exposed. Also wash your clothes.

According to data from the National Poison Center, less than three percent of all poisoning cases occurred in older adults. However, the outcomes for older people were more severe than for younger people. Nearly six percent of all poisonings with serious results and 28 percent of all poisoning deaths occur in older people. Scientists suspect that problems with vision and memory often lead to mistakes in pesticide use that would not normally occur in younger adults.²

Children who drink these products may become very ill. Hospital emergency room surveys suggest that children under age six are more likely to be harmed by chemicals and taken to the emergency room while they are visiting with their grandparents than in their

***To learn more about
ridding your home of
pests with non-chemical
and safer approaches
call the EPA at (703) 305-
5017. You may also visit
the EPA's Web site at
www.epa.gov/pesticides***

own homes. Older adults should store the products in a safe, child-proof place when little ones come to visit.

Protecting Your Health While Getting Rid of Pests

The Environmental Protection Agency suggests that you use strong chemicals and poisons only when absolutely necessary. You may want to consider safer alternatives too, such as traps, baits, and gels instead of sprays, liquids, or powders. A first step to avoid or to rid your home of pests is to remove their food, water, and shelter.

Learn About EPA's Aging Initiative

To help older adults enjoy a longer and healthier life and protect their loved ones, the EPA developed the Aging Initiative. The EPA's Aging Initiative is working to protect older adults from things in the environment that could harm health. For more information, visit the EPA's Web site at www.epa.gov/aging.

